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SIGNS AND OMENS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

COMMUNICATED BY G. L. KITTREDGE.

THE following poetical compendium of superstitions is reprinted from an undated broadside of about 1790, belonging to the Massachusetts Historical Society. The broadside mentions neither printer nor place of publication; but it was undoubtedly printed in America, and probably at Boston or elsewhere in New England. A few words or letters, lost on account of the somewhat tattered condition of the broadside, are conjecturally supplied within brackets.

FENNEL-SEED

An Excellent New Song, composed over a bed of FENNEL, just sown.

*"He that soweth Fennel Seed, soweth sorrow,
"For death will surely follow."*

I.

WHAT scripture says, we must always
Give good attention to;
But they're unwise who credit lies,
And count all fables true.
This bed contains the last remains
A thimble full or so,
Of *Fennel-Seed*, which should indeed
Have been sown long ago.

II.

But some receive and do believe
Strange fancies which they hear;
For some suppose whoever sows
This seed, won't live a year.
A thousand ways cut short our days,
None are exempt from death;
Yet we ne'er [r]ead that *Fennel-Seed*
Ee'r stopt a person's breath.

III.

I can't devise where danger lies,
In *Fennel-Seed* alone;
The seed of Dill as well might kill,
As any seed that's sown.

Should Heaven please to send disease
 Or death approach with speed,
 I don't think I shall sooner die
 For sowing *Fennel-Seed*.

IV.

Adam and *Eve* I [don't believe]
 E'er heard [of] *Fennel-Seed*;
 [And yet] they died, and more beside
 [In] Genesis we read:
 [Had it n]ot been for *Adam's* sin,
 [Earth]¹ might have been enjoyed;
 [Neither] [t]he weeds, nor *Fennel-Seeds*,
 [Would] e'er have life destroyed.

V.

If *Eve* had not these words forgot,
 Of this tree do not feed,
 Till head[s] were white we lived might
 In spite of *Fennel-Seed*:
 Tho' some man's wife departed life,
 After she'd sown a bed,
 Others I know have lived to sow
 Ten beds and are not dead.

VI.

With whims like these, the women tease,
 In tea cups they'll see danger;
 Cocks crow in door, forks stick in floor,
 These both denote a stranger.
 Dreams they'll relate, each morning wait
 Expecting some event,
 If a good dream they cheerful seem,
 If bad, then discontent.

VII.

Deluded souls who trust in moles,
 And dreams to guide their lives.
 Women like these some men may please,
 But seldom make good wives:
 A humble bee in house they see,
 Some friends are nigh at hand;
 And itching feet foretell you'll eat
 Your bread in foreign land.

VIII.

If spiders brown or white spinn down
 Before the women's eyes,
 If white they're sad, if black they're glad,
 This good luck signifies:

¹ Perhaps [Health].

An itching eye doth signify
The same's a humble bee;
It plainly shows, as they suppose,
Friends quickly they shall see.

IX.

If cards from [lap] by some mishap,
Unto the fl[oo]r descend,
Day's work is o'er, they'll do no mor[e,]
So that day's work must end:
Petticoats unpin: then they begin
Directly to conclude,
Some roguish man is nigh at hand,
Whose thoughts are very rude.

X.

Tricks they will try, thinking thereby,
The sooner to get wed;
I've known them bake a salted cake,
To eat when going to bed;
This cake it seems produces dreams,
As saltness causes thirst;
And it is said him they're to wed,
Will bring them water first.

XI.

If I should mix their signs with tricks,
It might increase my lines
To that degree, that's best for me
To mention only signs:
Now I shall speak of burning cheek,
And what it signifies;
By this they know some secret foe
Behind their backs tells lies.

XII.

If ears do ring then the next thing,
They hear of some decease,
With whims like these the women tease
And give themselves no peace:
The moon when new, they chance to vi[ew]
O'er the right shoulder first,
Tho this seems strange, till the next chan[ge]
Good luck attends them most.

XIII.

Fortunes they'll see in dregs of tea,
By looking in a dish;
They will relate your future fate,
Or tell you what you wish:

This sign ne'er fails cut not your nails
Upon a Sunday morn,
Ashamed that day you'll be they say,
As sure as you are born.

XIV.

Garters by chance untie, from thence
Their marriage is presaged:
By this they find that some man's mind
Upon them is engaged;
I could mention o'er a thous[an]d more,
But since I have no need,
I'll cease straightway, and o[nly say]
They're all like FENNEL [SE]ED.